

# October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

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Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women aside from skin cancer. One in every eight women will develop breast cancer in her lifetime. In the United States, it is estimated that 203,500 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and 39,600 will die from the disease this year. Even though women are 100 times more likely to develop breast cancer, approximately 1,500 men will be diagnosed and 400 will die from this disease this year.

The causes of breast cancer are not known. Studies show that the risk of breast cancer increases as a woman gets older. A combination of monthly breast self-exams, clinical breast exams and regular mammograms beginning at age 40 is the best way to detect breast cancer at its earliest and most treatable stages.

## Breast self-exams

Beginning at age 20, every woman should examine her breasts once a month to check for physical changes, especially the appearance of new lumps. The best time to do a breast self-exam is a few days after your period ends. If you are no longer menstruating, a breast self-exam should be performed once a month on the same day. Many women have a pattern of lumpiness in their breasts, which is normal. But if you feel any change or a new lump in your breasts or underarm, ask your doctor to examine the area.

## Clinical breast exam

Women ages 20 to 39 should have a clinical breast examination by a health professional every three years. Beginning at age 40, woman should have a clinical breast examination every year. The clinical breast examination includes a visual examination and carefully feeling the entire breast and underarm area. If you are 40 or older, schedule your mammogram close to the time of your clinical breast exam.

## Mammography

Mammography is the best screening method widely available for finding breast cancer early. A mammogram is an x-ray picture of the breast. Mammograms can often detect breast lumps before they can be felt. The American Cancer Society recommends that every woman age 40 and older should have a yearly mammogram. If you are younger than 40 with either a family history of breast cancer or other concerns about personal risk, talk with a trained medical professional about risk assessment, when to start getting mammograms and how often to have them.

Because no one knows exactly what causes breast cancer, there are no sure ways to prevent it. But there are steps that every woman can take that may make developing breast cancer less likely. These include eating healthy foods, exercising regularly and limiting the amount of alcohol you drink. Leading a healthy lifestyle will not eliminate your chance of getting breast cancer, but it may help reduce your risk.

For more information on women's or men's health topics or to request information for safety meetings, call HEHF Health Education Services at 373-3729 or send an e-mail message to \*HEHF Health Education Services. ■